

*Theology vol 95*

A  
LETTER

To the Reverend

Dr. *Francis Atterbury*:

Occasion'd by the

DOCTRINE

Lately deliver'd by him in a

FUNERAL-SERMON on 1 Cor. 15. 19.

August 30. 1706.

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*Length of Days is in her Right-hand: and in her Left-hand Riches and Honour. Her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace. Prov. 3. 16, 17.*

O Vitæ Philosophia Dux! O Virtutum indagatrix, expultrixque Vitiorum! Unus dies bene, & ex Præceptis tuis, actus, peccanti Immortalitati est an-reponendus. Cicero.

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L O N D O N :

Printed for A. Baldwin in Warwick-Lane.

1706.

LECTER

To the Reverend

Dr. Francis Atterbury:

Occasioned by the

DOCTRINE

lately delivered by him in a

THEATRICAL SERMON ON OR: 17. 19

April 30 1700.

Printed by J. Streater, at the Sign of the Star in St. Dunstons Church-yard, and sold by J. Smith, at the Sign of the Star in St. Dunstons Church-yard, and by J. Smith, at the Sign of the Star in St. Dunstons Church-yard.



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LONDON:

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1700.

A

# LETTER

To the Reverend

Dr. *Francis Atterbury*:

OCCASION'D

By the Doctrine lately deliver'd by  
him in a Funeral-Sermon, *August*  
*30. 1706.*

*Reverend Sir,*

**T**HE Concern which all serious  
Christians ought to have for the  
Cause of *Virtue*, and the Inter-  
est of *Practical Religion*, will  
easily plead my Excuse for addressing my  
self to you upon this Occasion, and after  
a Publick a manner. It is not the Design  
of this Trouble I give you, to detract from  
that

that *Character* which you have bestow'd on the *Gentleman*, at whose *Funeral* the *Sermon* now before me was preach'd: So far from that, that I rejoice in it; and heartily wish that it may have so good an effect upon all who read it, as to engage them to study to deserve the like. Nor is it my Design to lend any hand to the exposing you to the World: As it wou'd be a vain Presumption in an obscure Person to pretend to lessen a Reputation so establish'd as yours; so I hope I have Sense enough of my *Christian Duty*, to induce me to abhor so base and unchristian an Intention. But the same *Christian Duty* which forbids me to do this, engageth me to express a Concern upon all Occasions for the Cause of *Religion*, and to contribute all in my Power towards the right understanding the Nature of *Virtue*, and the Maxims and Precepts laid down in *Holy Scripture*. To speak plainly, The *Doctrine* deliver'd in your late Sermon at the *Funeral* of Mr. B. hath offended many serious, and understanding *Christians*; who cannot but esteem it false, and pernicious in it self, and utterly foreign from the Intention of St. Paul, on whom in great measure you fix it. This is the true Reason of the Trouble I now give you: And I do it after a Publick manner, because the *Doctrine* you have



have delivered is now Publick ; because it is fit that in so important a matter every one should see what can be said on each side, and judge themselves concerning the Meaning of the *Apostle*, and the Truth of the matter ; and because you may probably be more effectually engaged by this means either to defend your Doctrine with stronger Arguments, or to retract it in as Publick a manner as you have deliver'd it : One of which I cannot but think the Duty of a *Christian Divine*, when such *Objections* are proposed to him, in any important matter, as seem to have some Weight in them, and appear to proceed from no other Principle but a Desire that *Truth* may prevail.

In order therefore, to contribute something to the Satisfaction of others, and to engage your self to review with all serious Impartiality the Doctrinal Part of your late Sermon, permit me,

I. To represent to you what seems to me the true Intention of *St. Paul* in that Passage, from whence you have taken the Rise of your Discourse.

II. To endeavour to shew you from hence, how extremely foreign from that purpose of the *Apostle*, your  
Discourse

*Discourse* is, both as to what you have expressly fixed upon *him*, and as to what you insinuate to be agreeable to his purpose, tho' not necessarily imply'd in the *Letter* of the *Text*.

III. To endeavour to make you sensible, that the *Doctrine* you have delivered is as *false* in it self, as it is remote from the Intention of *St. Paul*, by offering to your Thoughts some Observations concerning your manner of proceeding in the *Argument* you have undertaken.

I. I beg leave to represent to you what seems to me to be the true *Intention* of *St. Paul* in that place (1 Cor. 15. 19.) from whence you have taken the Rise of your *Discourse*.

As to this, I need not observe to you, that He is there arguing against some very weak Persons in the *Church of Corinth*, who professed to believe in *Jesus Christ*, and yet denied the general Resurrection at the last Day, and consequently the Rewards of a Future State. In answer to these Persons, He first establisheth the Certainty of the *Resurrection* of *Christ* himself, upon the Testimony of many credible

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Witnesses, who saw him, and conversed with him after his Resurrection; from Verse the First to Verse the Twelfth. From the *Resurrection* of *Christ*, by which *Almighty God* professedly gave the World a Pledge and Assurance of the *Resurrection* of *other* dead Men, he proceeds to argue that *others* also shall arise from the *Dead*. For if it be false that *other* Men shall arise from the *Dead*, then will it follow that it is false that *Christ* is risen from the *Dead*, God having constituted *his* Resurrection an Assurance of *their* Resurrection, and made the *one* as certainly *to come*, as the *other* is certainly *past*. If therefore the *one* be not certainly *to come*, it will follow that the *other* is not certainly *past*. But the Resurrection of *Christ* is certainly *past*, as I have already proved from the Testimony of Eye-Witnesses: Therefore, the Supposition that *others* shall not arise, from whence the contrary would follow, is false; and consequently, *other* Men will likewise arise from the *Dead*. This seems to me to be the *Apostle's* Argument, as may appear more plainly, if we connect the Twentieth Verse to the Thirteenth, and read the 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, as included in a *Parenthesis*; for the whole Argument appears in those two Verses thus connected. Ver. 13. If there will  
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be no Resurrection of the Dead, it will follow from hence that *Christ* himself is not risen. Ver. 20. But *Christ* himself is certainly risen, and become the First-fruits of them that sleep; therefore *they* also shall certainly arise: Which Conclusion he farther pursues and illustrates. In that *Parenthesis* he goes on to urge upon those weak Believers the Consequences of that Absurdity he had reduced them to, *That Christ was not risen*; instead of immediately pursuing his main Argument, turning off a little to something incidental to it, (as we find him often doing in other Arguments,) and speaking to them to this purpose; Ver. 14. And if *Christ* be not risen, as is imply'd in your Denial of the Resurrection of other Men, it is the vainest and most fruitless thing imaginable for *us* to preach him, or for *you* to believe in him. Ver. 15. Nay, for *our* parts we shall be found False-witnesses for God, because we have pretended to witness that God hath raised *Christ* from the Dead, whom in truth he hath not raised, if it be true that other dead Persons shall never arise. [ Ver. 16. For I must tell you again, this is the Consequence of your Opinion, If it be true that the Dead shall not arise, it follows from hence, as I shew'd you before, that *Christ* is not himself risen. ]

Ver. 17.



Ver. 17. And for *your* parts, I tell you again, if Christ be not risen, it is the vainest thing in the World for *you* to believe in him. You cannot by this hope for any Justification, or Acquittance from the Guilt and Punishment of your Sins, which you have been encouraged to hope for : For God promiseth no Justification but upon supposition of *Christ's* Resurrection, *who died for our Sins, and arose again for our Justification.* Ver. 18. Nay, if Christ be not risen, it follows that all those who are now dead in Christ ; all who have laid down their Lives for his sake, have lost their Labour, and are utterly perish'd without hope. Now if you would not be thought thus to reflect on those glorious *Martyrs*, whom you pretend to commemorate with Honour, why are you so foolish as to deny the Resurrection of Men at the last Day, which by consequence, you see, destroys the Certainty of *Christ's* own Resurrection, and by that means reflects so highly upon those who have died *in*, and *for* his Faith. Then follows your *Text*, Ver. 19. In one word, this Absurdity of Christ's not being arisen from the Dead (which follows from your denial of a general Resurrection) makes the Condition of all who now believe in him much more miserable than that of other Men. For if

our Hope in *Christ* do not extend it self to another Life, and we do not consider, and believe in him as a Person raised from the Dead, and now alive in another and better state, we Christians, consider'd in the present Circumstances of things, and in the midst of those constant and bitter Persecutions in which we live, are the most to be pitied, and indeed the most miserable of all Men; being exposed to the most grievous Sufferings not only for a Falshood, but for the sake of a Person who is utterly extinct, and unable to do us any Service in this World, and much less in another. After his having urged these Absurdities upon those weak and imperfect Believers, he resumes his Argument, Ver. 20. and proceeds in it, as I have before observed. That he speaks this merely with respect to the bitter Sufferings the Profession of *Christianity* then exposed its Professors to, is evident from Ver. 30, 31, 32. where the *Apostle* speaks of himself to this effect: *To what purpose, and for what advantage do I endure those grievous Persecutions, which are as it were a continual and daily Death, for the sake of my Profession, if it be not true at last, that there is a Resurrection and a Future State, in which I may hope for a Reward? Upon this Supposition, that we must utterly perish at Death,*

it were better and wiser for us not to profess a groundless Faith, which exposeth us now to continual Persecutions without any Advantage, but rather to take such Methods as that we may enjoy the Necessaries and Conveniences of Life, as quietly, and with as little disturbance, as our Neighbours. Thus much may suffice for the establishing, and making clear, the Apostle's reasoning, and intention in this place. I proceed now,

II. To endeavour to shew you how extremely foreign from this purpose of the Apostle, your Discourse is, with respect both to what you have expressly fixed upon him, and to what you insinuate to be agreeable to his purpose, tho' not necessarily imply'd in the Letter of the Text.

First, You are pleased to call your Text a Concession which St. Paul openly makes to this purpose, *If all the Benefits we expect from the Christian Institution were confined within the Bounds of this present Life, and we had no hopes of a better state after this, of a great and lasting Reward in a Life to come, we Christians should be the most abandoned and wretched of Creatures; all other Sorts and Sects of Men would evidently have the Advantage of us, and a much surer Title to Happiness than we.* This is what

you expressly, and in so many Words, fix upon the *Apostle* as his Design in this Passage, P. 3. Ed. 8vo.

Now we usually, I think, call *that* a *Concession* which is yielded to an Adversary, and contended for by him; not *that* which he is unwilling to own, and which upon that account we urge upon him in order to oblige him to disown something else from which that follows. And this I take to be the Case here. The *Apostle* is not *conceding* to those weak Believers any thing they contended for, but is manifestly urging them with something, which he thought would startle them; an *Absurdity* they were not aware of, in order to oblige them to disown that Error from which this *Absurdity* follows. He seems to speak to them to this purpose. Your Denial of the general Resurrection implies in it a Denial of Christ's Resurrection: And the Denial of Christ's Resurrection by consequence proves his Disciples in these times the most miserable, and the most weak of all Men, who by professing to believe in one who is utterly perished, expose themselves to the most grievous Persecutions. If therefore you would not bring this Scandal upon your own Profession, you must not hold such an Opinion as manifestly tends to it in its Consequences.



sequences. This is evidently no *Concession*, but what we call *Argumentum ab Absurdo*, which is a very different thing.

But to let this pass, the main *Question* is, Whether your *Paraphrase* upon your Text be just, and well-grounded. There are two Parts of it, and, as I think, both very foreign from the *Apostle's* purpose.

1. That, upon the Supposition he makes in the Text, *We Christians should be the most abandoned and wretched of Creatures.*
2. That, upon the same Supposition, *all other Sorts and Sects of Men would evidently have the Advantage of us, and a much surer Title to Happiness than we.* I say both these are fixed upon the *Apostle* without any ground.

For, 1. The *Apostle* doth not appear to have once thought of such an unhandsome Comparison as the estate of good *Christians*, in this World, and the estate of *Brutes*, unless the Word which we translate *Men* can be proved to signify *Beasts* also : And much less to have designed, by an Assertion limited to the Times of most grievous Persecutions, to determine that, even in the ordinary and quiet Course of *God's* Providence, *Good Christians* are more miserable than *Beasts*, in this World, as it is plain you intend in what you here fix upon the *Apostle*.

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2. The *Apostle* doth not say that, upon the Supposition in the Text, *All other Sorts and Sects of Men have a surer Title to Happiness than true Christians*: Unless you can make that a general Proposition, and accommodate it to all Times, which he hath made a particular one, by accommodating it manifestly to the Times only of the bitterest Persecutions: Little imagining that their Unhappiness proceeded from their strict Observation of the Moral Rules of their Profession, (as you expressly maintain) or from any other Cause but the accidental Barbarity of the World about them at that time towards all who professed Faith in *Jesus Christ*.

Secondly, I observe that you first propose (as your own Words are) *to shew the undoubted Proof of the Apostle's Concession*, and then perform this, *by urging it somewhat farther than the Letter of the Text will carry us*: Which is indeed a new way of proving the Truth of *his Concession*, viz. by making *Concessions* of your own, and then labouring the Proof of them. But you would, to be sure, insinuate by this, that these Concessions (as you call them) which you here illustrate, are agreeable to the *Design*, tho' not to the *Letter* of the Text. Nay, *Pag. 9.* you expressly fix them upon

upon the *Apostle*, and call the Argument, into which you have put these *Concessions*, that great Argument for a Future State, which is urged by St. Paul in the Words before us.

*Thirdly*, You cannot, therefore, blame me if I be so concern'd lest any well-meaning Persons should be deceiv'd by this, as to give them notice that there is nothing in the *Apostle's* Words, or Design, which bears the least resemblance to what you here seem to fix upon him. For, I. He is as far from saying that *were there no Life after this Men would really be more miserable than Beasts* (as your Words are) as it is well possible to be imagined, as may appear by comparing this Proposition with the Proposition of St. Paul in the Text, viz. That if *Christians had no hopes in Christ, as arisen from the Dead, and now alive at God's Right-hand, they were the most miserable of all Men, to expose themselves to the bitterest Persecutions for the sake of a Falshood, and of a Man utterly extinct, and unable to assist, or reward them*; as they did at the time when this was written. If the former of these Propositions bear any relation (even the most distant possible) to the latter; nay, if the same Person who maintains the latter, may not justly abhor

abhor, and detest the *former*, I confess I understand nothing of *Logic* or *good Sense*. By what Right, therefore, you have in any sort charged this fond Opinion of your own upon so great an *Author*, I leave to you to consider, and to every serious *Reader* to judge. Neither, 2. Can any such Proposition be built upon the *Apostle's* Words as your second, *viz.* That *were there no Life after this, the best Men would be often the most miserable*, I mean, in the Sense in which you your self afterwards explain it; nay, nor in any Sense which I can think of. That the best Men are sometimes in this state the most miserable, as far as the Evils of this World can make them so, may possibly be true: But it is equally true, whether you suppose a Future State, or suppose it not. But I deny that the Evils of this World which they sometimes experience, as you have represented them, are sufficient to prove the *Wicked* more truly happy than the *Virtuous*, even in this state, and supposing no Life to come. This I shall have occasion to speak of by and by: At present I observe that this Proposition of yours hath no relation to the Design of the *Apostle* in the *Text*, which I think is very evident from hence, that the same Person may maintain (as the *Apostle* doth in the *Text*) that *if Christians*  
*have*



have no ground of hope in Jesus Christ as arisen from the Dead, and alive in another state, they are the most miserable of Men, as being exposed by their Profession to constant and bitter Persecutions, without any present or future Advantage: I say the same Person may maintain this, and yet deny with Justice the Truth of the following Proposition (which is yours) viz. That if there were no Life after this, the best of Men would be often the most miserable, i. e. as you explain it, that the Practice of the Moral Duties of the Christian Religion would, in the ordinary and quiet state of this World, be a greater Unhappiness to a Man than the Neglect, and Violation of 'em. This is in Truth a *Concession*; but such an one, I must tell you, as the *Apostle* might abhor, notwithstanding his *Affertion* in your *Text*; and such an one, as I am sorry to see made by any *Preacher* of *Righteousness*. But before I come to examine the Truth of these two *Concessions*, which you have here made to the Cause of Vice, as I proposed in the last place, I must observe,

*Fourthly*, That as you have sadly mistaken the *Apostle's* Words in your *Text*, so you have likewise widely wander'd from the

the *Inference* he design'd should be drawn from it. *Pag.* 8, 9. For he is not urging here an Argument, which should conclude absolutely in favour of a Future State. His main and conclusive Argument for the *general Resurrection* is the *Resurrection* of *Christ*, which he resumes in the next Verse. But here he is pressing them with some Considerations which he judged would peculiarly move them, and endeavours to make them sensible of the bad tendency of their false Opinion, which they were so weak as not to see, by Words to this effect: *By denying the general Resurrection, you call in question the Resurrection of Christ himself: and by doing this you make Christians the most miserable of Men; to expose themselves by their Profession to bitter and daily Persecutions, without any Advantage from their Master, either in this World, or in another. If you would not, therefore, cast this blot upon the Christian Religion, you must not maintain such Notions as by consequence infer this.* How distant is this from the Argument which you have expressly fixed upon *St. Paul*, *Pag.* 9. in these Words. *If in this Life only we had hope, Men would really be more miserable than Beasts; and the best of Men often the most miserable. But it is impossible to imagine that a God of infinite Wisdom*

*dom and Goodness should distribute Misery and Happiness so unequally, and absurdly. It remains, therefore, that good Men have a well-grounded hope in another Life, and are as certain of a future Recompence, as they are of the Being, and Attributes of God. God forbid it should be otherwise ! but God forbid they should build their Assurance of it on such Assertions as these, which I know not to have been ever before this, seriously maintain'd by any Person of Virtue, and Understanding ; much less, to have been solemnly dictated as Undoubted Truths from the Pulpit, and built upon the Authority of an Apostle.*

The Result of the whole is this: The *Apostle* speaks of *Christians* professing Faith in *Christ* : You speak of Persons practising the Moral Precepts of Religion. The *Apostle* speaks of the Condition of such *Christians* in a state of the most bitter Persecution : You speak of the Condition of virtuous Persons in the ordinary Course of *God's Providence*. The *Apostle* designs nothing by his *Assertion* and *Supposition*, but to shame those ignorant unwary Professors of *Christianity* out of their Denial of a general Resurrection: You on the contrary draw from your *Supposition*, and *Assertions*,

sertions, an absolute Argument for the Certainty of a Future State. So that, upon the review, it seems evident that you have mistaken the *Affertion* it self, which the Apostle layeth down in the Text ; the *Persons* concerning whom He intends it ; the *Times* to which He manifestly limits it ; and the *Conclusion* which He design'd should be drawn from it.

Having thus said what is sufficient to shew how foreign from the Design of the *Apostle*, the *Propositions*, and *Argument*, which you have been pleased to fix upon Him, are ; I proceed now, as I proposed,

III. To endeavour to make you sensible that the *Doctrine* you have delivered, according to your own Explication of it, is as false in it self, as it is remote from the Intention of *St. Paul* : And this I shall do, by offering to you some Observations upon your manner of proceeding in the Argument you have undertaken.

Your *Positions* are these, in your own Words, That were there no Life after this, First, Men would really be more miserable than Beasts ; and, Secondly, The best Men would be often the most miserable : I mean, as far as Happiness or Misery are to be  
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*measured from pleasing or painful Sensations : And supposing the present to be the only Life we are to lead, I see not but that this might be esteemed the true measure of them.* In these Words you declare, as plainly as one could expect from any *Christian Divine*, that, supposing no Life after this, the Practice of Virtue would not be the *Happiness* of Man, but the Pursuit of those Bodily Pleasures which the *Beasts* are capable of enjoying : An Opinion, which whatever *Christians* may think of it, the best of the *Heathen Philosophers* would have detested ; I was going to say, and the *worst* likewise : For I may venture to affirm that *Epicurus* himself was far from speaking at this rate concerning Virtue, tho' he absolutely deny'd not only a *Future State*, but the Superintendency of any wise Providence over *this*. And these *Positions* you maintain, without once supposing such a state of Persecution, as the *Apostle* pointed at : But with reference to the most quiet and prosperous Condition of this Life ; supposing throughout the whole Man to be that same rational Creature he is now ; and supposing your good Man to be a good *Christian* ; not only to know God, but to have the present Support of the Belief of a Future State, and that  
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firm Expectation of Rewards such an one ought to have. You suppose him to lead a Life of Virtue upon such Motives, and yet you positively affirm that the *Beasts* and *Wickedest* of Men enjoy here below *a more entire and perfect Happiness* than this good Man even in the most quiet and prosperous Condition of this Life. But, to proceed to my *Observations*,

1. It hath a very strange appearance, that after you have called these *Undoubted Truths*, which cannot be true unless that Notion be so, on which they are entirely founded, *viz. That Happiness and Misery in this state are to be measured by pleasing and painful bodily Sensations*; and that after you have undertaken the Proof of these *Undoubted Truths*, you should not say the least word for the Proof of *that* on which only they can be founded; but take *that* for granted which is the main Point in Dispute, and fly to the Demonstration of *that*, which signifies nothing without having first demonstrated the Truth of the other. This, I say, is a very strange way of proceeding in so important a matter as this.

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2. It is likewise as unaccountable, that in making the Comparison first between *Men* and *Beasts*, and then between the *Best* and the *Worst* of Men, you should not once mention any single Instance of the Excellence of the former above the latter. This certainly might be expected at your hands, when you undertook to state this Point; to consider all things on all sides before you determine on which part the greatest Happiness lies, in any state. This indeed is but the Continuance of the former way of Procedure. But one would have thought, that even supposing no other state after this, it were some Advantage to be made capable of knowing God, of imitating Him, of seeing Him in his Works, of studying and finding out Truth. One would have thought that the Pleasures of true Learning, and sound Sense; the Pleasures of Friendship, and honest Society; of interchanging mutual Good-Offices; of contributing to the Ease and Happiness of our Fellow-Creatures; and of the Practice of many Virtues which are Happiness it self, might have been worth the mentioning: Not to say, might have been accounted by you far beyond the Pleasures of Sense even in this state.

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But it seems these are nothing in themselves, when compared with the noble Pleasures which the *Beasts* so freely enjoy. And yet one thing methinks so naturally offer'd it self upon this Head, that it cou'd hardly escape the Observation of one who places so much Happiness in such things, *viz.* that *Men* have a liberty of enjoying the *Bodily Pleasures* with Temperance, and under some reasonable Restraints; as well as the *Beasts*; and besides this, enjoy those Advantages before-mentioned.

3. It is again wonderful, that you should not think it worth your while to mention any single Disadvantage either of *Beasts*, in their being made wholly incapable of these God-like Satisfaction; or of wicked Men, in the Prosecution of their *Lusts* and *Passions*. What? Is it of no account that wicked Men follow their Inclinations, even upon your own Supposition, in contradiction to their Reason? Or, Is this an happier state than to follow Reason, and imitate God, in contradiction to Inclination? Doth not the latter necessarily leave the *Man* in a more happy present state than the former? Or, Are those Lashes of Conscience under which you suppose the Wicked, of no manner of Considera-



sideration ? Is it of no account, that the Intemperate Pursuit of the Pleasures the Wicked chuse, destroys even their own Design, and leads them into a thousand Sicknesses, Disturbances, Perplexities, Deaths, which the Virtuous keep off by their Temperance, and Chastity, and Command over their *Appetites* ? Is it of no account, that Envy, Malice, Revenge, Insatiable Desire of Riches, or Honours, are present Unhappiness in themselves ; and that the Virtues contrary to them are Inward Peace, and Harmony, and Quiet ? Is it of no account, that many Vices impair the Health, destroy the Vigor of the Mind, hasten Death, ruine Estates, disturb Families, render Men the Scorn and Contempt of the good part of the World ? And are not these certain Inconveniences, and Unhappinesses in this present state, and such as were fit to be mentioned ? Is it of no account, that Wicked Men are as liable to Sicknes, and Afflictions, as the Good, and want those Supports in them, which the Good, and Upright, upon your own Supposition, enjoy ; nay, that their very Successes in this World are very frequently the Occasions, and Instruments, even of their

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present Ruine, and Unhappiness? And, why, I pray, should all this be overlooked for the sake of those brutish Pleasures in which they indulge themselves, even beyond the Example of *Beasts*?

4. It is wonderfully strange, that you should not consider, that the Chief Happiness of any Being, in whatsoever state it is, or of what Duration soever its Life is, must result from the most excellent Part of its Constitution; that the Happiness of a *Being* made capable of imitating God, tho' for never so short a time, must consist in that Imitation; that Virtue is the Imitation of God, and therefore must be the Happiness of Man: That the Chief Happiness of a reasonable Creature must consist in living as Reason directs, whether he lives one Day, or to Eternity; whether he lives in this state only, or in another afterwards; whether he hath Inclinations to the contrary, or not, provided they be such as may be conquered. For neither can the time of his Duration, or the Tendency of such Inclinations, alter any thing in this matter; unless to make Virtue more difficult, which doth not destroy the Excellence

cellence of it, and present Happiness resulting from it, but enhance and improve it. Besides, on the other hand, the Practice of Vice, tho' it be *with* the Inclination, yet is *against* Reason, and Conscience, upon your own *Hypothesis*; and leads the Man to greater Disquiet, and Unhappiness, than is implied in resisting a present Inclination when *Reason* and *Conscience* direct. It is very strange likewise, that you should not consider that the Pleasures, and good things of this Life properly so called, and true Happiness *in* this Life, are two very different things; that they are much oftner separated than united; and that they who pursue the *former* within the Bounds of Religion, have always most of the *latter*, in the ordinary Course of this World, to which your *Positions* are adapted.

5. On the other hand, it is equally strange, that you should not consider the Consequences of such a *Principle* as you build upon; that upon your Supposition the Imitation of God, tho' it do not expose to any considerable external Calamities, is not to be compared for Happiness to the greedy pursuit of

the Bestial Pleasures, or the Riches, and Honours of this World; that supposing *Man* and *Beast* both immortal in this *state*, it had been eligible to have been made a *Beast* rather than a *Man*; or to be the most *Wicked*, than the most *Virtuous* of Men; that *Virtue* doth not in its own Nature tend so much to the Happiness of Man in the most quiet state of this World, as the *Bestial* Enjoyments pursu'd even against the Dictates of Conscience, and under the Apprehension of a future Reckoning. I might name many more Absurdities, coincident with these, which follow from your *Principle* as you appear to have understood it your self. But these are sufficient to deter any Man from maintaining it: And I here mention them, not to charge them upon *You*, but upon your *Doctrine*, in order to shew you the Unreasonableness of it.

6. It is likewise unaccountable, that you should not consider the bad Influences such *Positions* must have upon *some* Men; and the no Service of them to any good Purposes. For by this performance of yours you have unwarily put more into the Mouths of *licentious* Persons



sons than they ever yet generally contended for : It having been often owned by many of them, that the steady Practice of Virtue is more eligible even in this World, than the contrary, unless in a state of bitter Persecution ; if ever there was or can be a Persecution merely for the sake of the Moral Virtues of any Persons ; which I much question. Whereas *You* suppose no Case of *Persecution* ; and yet concede *to* them, or rather contend *for* them, that the Practice of Vice tends to greater Happiness (supposing no state but the present) than the strict Practice of Virtue. Your Positions deprive the Cause of Virtue of a very good and proper Argument to recommend it to the Tryal of any Persons who are Strangers to it, *viz.* That it will contribute even to their present Happiness much more than *Vice* ; that it will more consult the Ease of their Minds, the Health of their Bodies, the Preservation, and Increase of their Estates, the Establishment of their good Name ; all which are, in their several degrees, present Happiness. Your *Doctrine* robs even *Christianity* it self of an excellent Argument, *viz.* That the Moral Virtues it recommends, are in themselves infinitely

nitely preferable to the Vices contrary to them; and much more conducive to the *present* Happiness of Man, as well as to his *future*. It seems to contradict several *Texts* of *Scripture*, which declare at least thus much, that, in the ordinary Course of God's Providence, the Virtuous Man doth more truly enjoy Happiness even in this Life, than the Wicked. And it gives a wide Encouragement to Men who have no Faith, or a very weak one concerning *Future Rewards*, to disturb Human Society by their inordinate Pursuit of the *Bestial Pleasures*: Which one Consideration, I think, sufficient to have prevailed with any true *Lover* of the *Public* to have buried such Thoughts as these in perpetual Darkness. For whatever degree of present Happiness the prosecution of Men's *Lusts* and *Passions* may bring to themselves, it is manifest it tends to the Disturbance, Unhappiness, and Ruine of *Human Society* much more than the Practice of Virtue: And methinks this is a very good Argument that it cannot be the greatest Happiness of any particular Persons in this Life. To counterbalance these pernicious Effects, I cannot call to mind one single good Effect this Doctrine can have. I

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am sure the Certainty of a Future State stands in need of no such Supports as this. *Philosophers* asserted it, whilst they strenuously maintained that the Practice of Virtue was infinitely preferable to Vice even without looking beyond this present state; tho' you are pleased to fix the contrary upon them. And so may *Christians*: For I know not that our *Lord* hath changed the Tendencies of things, or detracted any thing from the Aimableness, or present Happiness of Virtue. His Resurrection from the Dead, and the Assurances of a Future State, which He confirmed by numberless Miracles, added to the Presumptions of Reason, are sufficient to satisfy all who are willing to listen to *Truth*. And if they be not, *they* must be of an odd Composition, who are induced to believe that *Virtue* shall be rewarded in another Life, because it is not in its own Nature so great an Happiness to Man in this state, as the Prosecution of the *Bestial* Pleasures; because *Beasts*, and *Profligate Sinners*, enjoy more entire and perfect Happiness in this state than the most Virtuous Men, even supposing them in a state of Prosperity, and outward Quiet. I have heard indeed the Advantages of  
*Beasts*

*Beasts* above Men in the Enjoyment of *Bodily Pleasures* insisted on, to make Men ashamed of making such Pleasures their main End, and to make them sensible they are not the Happiness of *Man*, whether there be another Life, or no. I have heard the Sufferings and Afflictions of many good Men here below, made an Argument that in another state, all the Virtuous shall have the Outward as well as Inward Tokens of God's Favour. But I never yet heard, nor ever expected to hear it from a Pulpit, That (supposing no state after this,) the *Bestial Life* was truly more happy, and consequently more eligible than the Virtuous Life: Or, that the Practice of Vice in its own Nature tended to make Men more happy in all states of this Life, than the Practice of Virtue: And this under the specious Title of an Argument for a *Future State*, which needs not such Supports, and ought not to be believ'd upon such Principles, as do so highly reflect upon that *Virtue* which is the Imitation of the most perfect, and most happy of all *Beings*.



7. It is extremely unaccountable that in proving your *Positions*, you should make use of such Arguments as really prove the contrary to what you design; and effectually over-turn what you are labouring to establish. Thus, for Instance, you represent it as the present Unhappiness of Man that he is under the Checks of Reason, and Reflexion; that he hath a Notion of a Superior Good, and an Higher End than the Bestial Pleasures, to which he is ordained; and Presages of a Future Reckoning: And the contrary, the Happiness of *Beasts* above him. Whereas all wise Men have hitherto taught that these were his glorious Privileges, not his Infelicities; that it is the greatest present Happiness to know God, to understand his Nature, to be guided by Reason and Conscience to imitate his Moral Perfections, to live under the Apprehension of a Future State, and of being removed into it; and to be kept by this means within the Bounds that Reasonable Creatures ought to wish for, and not to lament. This is pleasant in the Practice, as it is agreeable to our most Excellent Part: And highly delightful in the Review.

In the ordinary Course of things, it keeps off a great many Temporal Evils, and gives the Man that Rational Happiness, which is infinitely beyond the *Brutal*.

As for the *Dread of Death*, St. Paul himself reckons them delivered in great measure from this *Bondage* who believe a *Future State*: And you suppose Mankind here to be under the Apprehension of a *Future State*, and yet quote him to prove them in *Bondage* to that *Dread*. Accordingly we find that many of the best *Heathens* were so far from being made perpetually miserable by the *Dread of Death*, that they could look upon it with some degree of Satisfaction, merely thro' that Belief *they* had of a future and better state. And surely, therefore, this is not sufficient to depress the present Happiness of the best of Men below that of Beasts; much less that of the best *Christians*, whom yet amongst others you undertook to prove more miserable than *Beasts*, supposing no *Future State*: but something might have been thought of, in their Condition, sufficient to counterbalance this single Evil. Nay, I know not whether Mankind would not run them

into much greater present Evils, and Miseries, were they free from this Apprehension, than they do now they are under it. Besides, the Pleasures it most affects, and spoils, are those of the Wicked, who are most terrify'd with this Apprehension. And therefore if this be of such Weight, in order to prove Men more miserable than *Beasts* in this World, it will help to destroy your *second Position*, and prove Wicked Men, who are most alarm'd by it, much more miserable than the Good and Virtuous.

Again, You place the Happiness of *Beasts* above Men in this, That *in their Fruitions they are carried no farther than Nature directs, and leave off at the point at which Excess would grow troublesome, and hazardous*: And under your next Head you esteem it the Unhappiness of *Good Men* that they govern their Appetites, and the contrary the Happiness of the *Wicked*. Now if it be the Unhappiness of Men in general, under your *first* Head, that they proceed in Pleasure to troublesome, and hazardous Excesses, this will prove it the Unhappiness of Wicked Men, under your *second* Head, that they do not govern their Appetites, but go on to great Excess

in their Corporeal Enjoyments; and give a vast Advantage to Good Men above them, who enjoy all the good things of this Life with *Temperance*. But indeed all that you say in proof of your *first Position*, concerning the present Advantages of the *Beasts* above *Men*, affects only the *Case* of the *Wicked Part* of Mankind; which only it is that enjoys Bodily Pleasure to Excess, or that finds any such Torment in the Knowledge of God, or in the Apprehension of a Future State, as is sufficient to render any Beings more miserable than they would be without these. And the Righteous Man having no *Torment* from his Conscience, or his Principles, comparable to the *Supports* he hath from them: All this manifestly destroys your *second Position*, and as plainly sets *Him* above the *Wicked* Man in point of present Happiness, as it depresses the *Sinner* below the *Beast*.

Again, You represent it as the unhappiness of *Good Men* in this State above the *Wicked*, that they are obliged by their Religion to be *moderate* in the use of worldly Pleasures; to keep their lower Appetites in due subjection to their Reasoning Powers; to set Bounds

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to their Desires after Riches, and Honours; and to be *contented* in *whatsoever State they are*; and as the Happiness of wicked Men above them, that they permit themselves to act contrary to the good Man in these Cases. Which is just as if you had argued in other Words, The virtuous Man is obliged by his Religion to be more easy, and *happy* within than the *Wicked*; therefore he is more *unhappy*. What is it to bound our Desires in this World, with respect to the *Riches* and *Honours* of it, but to be without those Racks and Tortures which the *covetous* and *ambitious* Men continually feel? And, above all, what is it to be obliged to be *contented*, but to be obliged to be *happy*? Yet do we here find the poor unhappy good Man condemned, as more miserable than his *Neighbour*, because he is less covetous, less ambitious, and more contented than *he*. Again, What is it to be obliged to be *humble*, to be meek, to be placable, and easy to forgive, but to be without those Torments, and Uneasinesses, Pride, and Haughtiness, and Revenge carry along with them? Yet you are pleased to reckon this also part of the good Man's

Man's present Unhappiness, that he is humble, and easy to forgive; *i. e.* that he is good-natured; not inwardly discomposed, and ruffled; not carried beyond himself into a thousand Inconveniences by his turbulent Passions. And because this Temper sometimes may incite wicked Men to injure him (tho' it oftener melts them into a sort of Goodness, and doth not hinder *him* from any *Self-defense*, or *Legal Redress*) therefore is he set forth as unhappy, because he is easy to forgive; and, in the mean while, those innumerable Plagues that are inseparable from the Spirit of *Revenge*, and *Pride*; and all that Train of temporal Evils, and Deaths, that it is seen to bring along with it, are forgotten, as of no manner of account in this Cause. Neither is there any thing said here, of any account, but that a good Man will sometimes look singular, and be abused in Words and Actions by the Wicked. Now this may be, and yet the wicked Wretch under the Lashes of his own enraged Conscience, and the Terrors of a future Account; in his unmanly slavery to Sin, and under the Tyranny of *Pride*, and *Revenge*, and *Covetousness*, must be incom-

comparably more unhappy at present, than\* this Good Man, who doth not measure his Happiness by the Opinion of the *Wicked*, and finds at present, more than enough in the regular Practices of Vertue, to counterbalance such an Inconvenience; much more in the prospect, and belief of future Rewards, which you suppose him to expect. Nor do I believe the World ever to have been so corrupt since the Flood, but that in civilized Nations a Man may sooner be respected and honoured for his Moral Virtues, by the generality of Men, than affronted, and injured on *their* Account: And so a parallel *Objection* may be drawn from hence, against the Happiness of the *Wicked* Man, that he will be forsaken, neglected, avoided, and condemned by the *Best* part of Mankind. And then the *Question* is, Whether this doth not counterbalance the Reproaches of the *Wicked*; Or, whether the constant Neglect, and Contempt of Good Men, be more eligible than the Affronts of some of the *Wicked*, which will sometimes be the virtuous Man's Portion.

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These are the demonstrative Reasons upon which you are pleased to declare not only that Good Men are hinder'd by their Principles from so great an Enjoyment of Pleasure as *Beasts*, and *Wicked Men*, and exposed by them to greater Unhappineſſes, and so are of all Creatures, in this ſtate, the moſt miſerable; but in plainer Words, p. 8. That *the impious Man's Joys in this ſtate, do upon the whole exceed thoſe of the Upright*; (tho' in truth you have not been ſo impartial as to mention any of the Advantages of the *Upright*;) and that *the Beasts of the Field which ſerve not God, and know him not, do here enjoy a more entire and perfect Happineſs than the Lord of this lower Creation, Man himſelf, made in God's own Image, to acknowledge and adore Him*: Words, which I confeſs, I am almoſt aſhamed to repeat. Whereas theſe very *Reasons*, and what is included in them, are fully ſufficient to prove the contrary, that upon the whole, the Pleaſures and Happineſs of the *virtuous Man*, do, in the ordinary Courſe of God's Providence, even in this State, exceed thoſe of the *Wicked*, and of the *Brute*.



8. Give me leave to observe farther, that tho' you are so favourable to the best of Men, in the *second* of your *Assertions*, as to profess only to shew that they are *often* the most miserable; you afterwards are pleased to change your Mind, and demonstrate them *always* to be so, and in all states of this Life; taking your main Proof of this, from that Obligation to some particular Practices, from which they are never exempt in any Condition of this Life: Another Method of Procedure which looks very strange, and *unaccountable*.

9. It is likewise very unaccountable, that you should lay it down at first, and fix it upon the *Apostle* (p. 1.) That *all other Sorts and Sects of Men would evidently have the advantage of Christians, and a much surer Title to Happiness*, were there no other state but this; and afterwards prove the present Unhappiness of *Good Christians* from such *Topics* as equally conclude against all the *Philosophical Sects*, which have been of any account in the World. Did not the *Peripatetics*; the *Stoics*; nay, did not

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*Epicurus* himself teach the Government of our lower *Appetites* ; the keeping our Desires within Bounds ; the Virtue of *Contentment* ; a Freedom, and Disengagement from all discomposing *Passions* ; in fine, such a Behaviour as often made their Followers singular, and exposed them to the Affronts of the other Part of the World ? And if this be so, what Advantages had these *Sects* over the *Christians* , since they had all those very Unhappineffes you have seen fit to fix upon the best of *Christians* ?

10. Last of all, I cannot but think it very strange, that after you have summ'd up your Argument, p. 8. you should fix it upon the antient Philosophers, as the best Argument for a Future State, which Mankind had to rest upon before the Christian Revelation ; and affirm, p. 9. That the only sure Foundation of Hope, which the wisest, and most thoughtful Men amongst the Heathen pretended in this Case to have, was, from the Consideration suggested in the Text, as you have explained it ; for so to be sure you mean. Whereas, I do not think you can name one serious Philosopher

sopher amongst all the *Antients*, who ever taught that Man was more miserable in this Life than the Beasts ; or that the Best of Men are render'd more miserable than the Wicked, by the Practice of Virtue, as you have explain'd these two Points, p. 5, 6, 7. or that *the impious Man's Joys do, upon the whole, exceed those of the Upright ;* or that *the Beasts of the Field, which know not God, enjoy a more entire and perfect Happiness in this state than Man ;* nay, than the Best of Men in the most quiet and prosperous Course of God's Providence : Which are the *Positions* you have undertaken to maintain. Innumerable are the Passages in the *Wisest* of the *Heathen Philosophers* which are known absolutely to contradict these *Positions*, and to carry the matter so high the other way, as to make *Virtue* its own Reward in all Circumstances of *Life* ; and the most afflicted state of the *Virtuous* Man preferable at present to the most prosperous and flourishing Condition of the *Vicious*. How unlikely, therefore, is it that they should make use of an *Argument* for a *Future State*, the main Parts of which they always rejected as false ? And

how unaccountable is it that you should fix this upon *them* who do so frequently, and zealously express themselves against such Positions?

These are the Considerations which I could not but think proper to represent to you upon this Occasion. If you do not think them wholly Frivolous, or beneath your Regard, you will judge it worth your while to review your *Sermon* again. And that you may not reject them wholly, without giving any farther Account of so important a Subject to the World, I solemnly assure you, that this Representation proceeds from no other Principle, but a desire that the Truth may be known in so important a Matter; that the Cause of *Virtue*, which is the Cause of God, may not suffer thro' the frailty of Men; and that you may have a fair Occasion, either of explaining and defending your sense, so as to rectify the Mistakes, and remove the Prejudices of many serious *Christians*, or of acknowledging your Error, and joining in the Confirmation of the opposite Truth. All who have any esteem for you, must needs lament that you have in this *Sermon* given your Adversaries such an Handle to triumph over



over you. All who have any Respect for the *Clergy*, must lament that such strange *Doctrine* should be recommended to the World by one of that Body. And all who have any Regard to the Honour of *Christ*, must lament to see it solemnly back'd, and confirmed by the Authority of one of his *Apostles*.

For my own part, I have not said what I think it truly deserves; nor could I if I would. But, I hope, I have said enough to engage you to take a second view of this Subject: And shall only therefore now commend you to the Direction of God's Holy Spirit, and so bid you, *Farewel*.

F I N I S.

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E R R A T A

Page 14. Line 19. for *Proof*, read *Truth*.

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ERRATA

Page 14 line 10 for 'and' read 'and'

